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## Our Quarrel with Castro

by Gabriel Kolko

*Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere* does not conform to popular notices on Cuba. But in their cool dissection of the history of US-Cuban relations from 1958 to the invasion of April 1961, based on all available US and Cuban printed records, radio transcripts, and numerous interviews with Cubans, from Che Guevara down, Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer have written a book

*Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*  
by Maurice Zeitlin and Robert Scheer  
(Grove; \$95)

that will irritate official circles and win the admiration of those who want an accurate record.

The authors describe the poverty of the Cuban countryside prior to the revolution, the one-crop economy, the extent of US economic penetration, and the history of Cuba as an American dependency. Castro's 26th of July movement, ambiguous and non-dogmatic in its approach, with a history of hostility to and from the Cuban Communist Party, was clear on one point: it was dedicated to an imprecisely defined new economic deal for Cuba. "The Cuban Revolution is, above all, a revolution for economic development." And, ultimately, the State Department, unable to accept equality with a former satellite and guided by its desire to preserve US investments in Cuba, came into direct conflict with the goals of the revolution.

The authors show that the Cuban revolutionaries faced important US hostility the moment they took over in January 1959. They were perplexed by American press and Congressional aversion toward the trials of Batista's henchmen, trials inhibiting direct action by a population seeking revenge for years of terror which had, in turn,

evoked no murmur of indignation in Washington. The State Department itself remained aloof during the first five months of 1959, both from the trials and from Castro's inept but genuine attempts to get economic aid. Its hostility emerged only after Cuba's Agrarian Reform Act of May 17, 1959, threatened to expropriate US investments in Cuban sugar lands. The State Department's June 11 note to Cuba, while insisting this government was not opposed to land reform, rejected the terms of the new law and failed to indicate acceptable alternatives, putting the US in opposition to Castro's plans for land reform and economic development. From this time on, the authors maintain, "The crux of the dispute between Cuba and the United States was property."

Zeitlin and Scheer describe the subsequent crises over Florida-based air raids, the seizure of US property, and the conflict over US refineries processing Soviet oil. They detail how the Cubans attempted at the beginning of 1960 to normalize relations with Washington and to increase sugar exports, and the rebuffs. Three weeks after the Eisenhower Administration decided to ask Congress for authorizing legislation to cut Cuba's sugar quota, the Cubans themselves entered into a trade act with the Soviet Union.

Increased Cuban economic dependence on Russia as a result of American actions also radically altered the role of the Cuban Communist Party. The authors have a unique grasp of the history of the Cuban labor movement and Communist Party, and document the Party's early opposition to the 26th of July movement and its conflicts with Castro throughout 1959—long after

Castro was being accused in the US of having Communist tendencies. When, on March 17, 1960, President Eisenhower authorized the CIA to help prepare Cuban refugees to invade Cuba, the Communist Party was still a minor force, at least three major opposition papers were being published in Havana, Castro enjoyed enormous mass support, and Cuba had not even re-established diplomatic ties with the Soviet Union. Not until April 15, 1961, when the invasion of Cuba was imminent, did Castro refer to the Cuban revolution as "socialist."

If the authors do not adequately cover US efforts to close off Western outlets for Cuban sugar or the successful attempt to stop the sale of refinery parts or Mexican oil to Cuba, their outline of US-Cuban relations from July 1960 until the invasion is excellent. They appreciate the negative role the American election of 1960 had in making Cuba a football; their discussion of the inconsistencies and errors of fact in the State Department's White Paper of April 1961, intended to provide a justification for support of the invasion, will serve as a model of devastating but unemotional political analysis.

Zeitlin and Scheer are critical of Castro's timing on a number of key occasions and can hardly be considered slavish defenders of the revolution. They feel that what the US does will be crucial in determining the final form of the Cuban revolution, whether it be totalitarian or libertarian. Washington has, in effect, taken a "Chinese" stand on coexistence with Cuba. "Cuba is an American tragedy," claim the authors, and if America does not undo its damage the Cuban revolution will be forced to develop its totalitarian aspects to preserve itself. The evidence in *Cuba: Tragedy in Our Hemisphere*, hardly warrants optimism on this score.